

CHARACTER OF MILL AVENUE DISTRICT

Mill Avenue District embraces several Core Values to create an experience here that is "Inviting, Creative, Exciting, Relevant and Authentic." If you have had the pleasure of meeting him, Walt Richardson embodies all of these Core Values as a denizen of Mill Avenue District. To meet him and to know him, you can readily sense that he invites you in, creates a moment for you in an exciting and relevant way, and that he is truly authentic, just like Mill Avenue District. Walt's life theme is, "Arts for the healing of humanity," and after an hour in the presence of this local entertainer it is easy to come under the spell of his caring for people and his love of this place. Mill Avenue District presents...

PROFILE: Walt Richardson, Entertainer/Singer/Songwriter

TITLE/ORGANIZATION: Mood in Virgo Productions, Principal

LENGTH OF TIME ASSOCIATED WITH MILL AVENUE DISTRICT: 33 years

EDUCATION: Bachelors in Speech Communication from ASU, 1976

MAJOR CHALLENGE IN YOUR BUSINESS:

As an artist and a performer, it is sometimes difficult to put aside your own "internal critic" so that you can just let the music flow.

MENTORS/OTHERS ADMIRED: In focus, spirituality, drive, faith and guidance, my father was a role model that I only later in life came to appreciate as something rare. On the artistic side, I admire the lyrics of the social movement music makers of the 60's.

LITTLE KNOWN FACT: A few years back I won the contest to rename the old Mae West Restaurant, now known as Harlowe's. My prize was a free meal whenever I walk in the door. Needless to say, it's my favorite restaurant.

HOBBIES/AVOCATIONS: I just completed Student Level II as a Reiki healer and have a goal to achieve Master Level. I'm also interested in drawing, painting and interior decorative painting.

- Q. How have you been involved to advance the goals of Mill Avenue District?
- A. Following graduation from ASU, I immediately went to work as a performer in downtown Tempe, and the allure of Mill Avenue District continues to keep me rooted here. I'd like to think I've had a role in establishing part of the "story" of this place and creating its musical lore and culture.
- Q. What story or aspect about Mill Avenue District is a favorite of yours?
- A. There used to be a club (where Coconut Club is now located), with balconies where you could watch happenings on Mill Avenue below. Harley riders love this place and that evening there were bikes parked all in a row, until a woman driving a car bumped the first one in line...causing all the others to fall over like dominoes. Fun to just observe that scene as it unfolded.

- Q. If you ruled the world, what would you change in Mill Avenue District?
- A. I'd like to see someone design some canvas sail-type shade structures overarching Mill Avenue. And, just for a few hours each week...maybe on Friday or Saturday evening...close off a section for pedestrians only to create that wonderful energy that we feel during the Festival of the Arts. Oh, and please give us back the Hayden Square amphitheater! What wonderful experiences we've all had there and must have again...let's open the Time Capsule imbedded on the stage!
- Q. What is your vision for the future of Mill Avenue District?
- A. While I have wonderful memories of the past in Mill Avenue District, we must continue to make it alluring for the next one's who will give us a globally competitive, but still unique and authentic, downtown in Tempe. Plus, I'd like to get involved with coordinating small music venues throughout Mill Avenue District in the new places under construction. The best live artistic experiences happen in intimate spaces.
- Q. Is there a particular personal success of which you are most proud?
- For 15 years I have served on the Arizona Commission for the Arts, and I am very proud of the several workshops I conducted on the reservations to help expose youngsters to the arts.
- Q. What makes Walt Richardson a part of Mill Avenue District's "character?"
- A. I try to make people feel comfortable, to be themselves and to understand how special they are. While conducting Rula Bula's Tuesday night "Open Mike" sessions, I've seen some amazing individuals transform themselves. Of course, there are my dreadlocks...